

Excavations at Dunineny Castle, Co. Antrim

By T. E. McNEILL

THE excavation of a cliff-top site on the north coast of Ulster showed that what had been taken for a small 15th- or 16th-century castle had a more complex history. An early phase may have been a late prehistoric or protohistoric promontory fort. This was re-occupied as a base for a small detachment of troops in the late 16th century. Shortly after 1600 it was chosen as the site for a castle by Sir Randall MacDonnell, later Earl of Antrim. It was built to serve as the administrative centre for one of his baronies rather than either a military or a residential place. As such, it shows how, in Gaelic-speaking Ulster and Scotland, medieval structures continued to be built, and how such a castle was perceived as part of the organisation of estates in a purely medieval fashion even at this date.

THE PROBLEM AND THE SITE BEFORE EXCAVATION

The end of an era is always interesting and in the case of Medieval Britain, with the transition to 'Renaissance' or 'Early Modern' times, it is a key issue for the Society for Medieval Archaeology.¹ The issue has been much debated, between archaeologists and historians of politics, economics or art, but the debate has normally been centred on the south of England, where the process can be seen most clearly in terms of the impact of a new state power, the Protestant religion, or the ideas of Renaissance Europe. To a great extent these are also issues for eastern, Lowland Scotland, especially for the impact of French Renaissance motifs. However, the boundary is not just difficult to date confidently or precisely, but its date varies according to location within the British Isles; the further we go from London or Edinburgh to the north and west, the more the story changes. In the Gaelic-speaking world, with its core in Ulster and the Scottish Highlands and Islands, the political change is not one of evolution during the earlier 16th century but of a later (1550–1650) imposition of Tudor and Stuart power by force. The Protestant religion, in its different guises, was a banner for this intrusion, not a matter for rational debate (if there was ever such a thing in 16th-century Christianity). The new, early industrial and commercial measures of the social order and economic organisation lacked any base; their medieval foundations had never been securely established. In this region, the end of the Middle Ages may be argued to come in the 17th century, not the 16th: even the formal, political transition comes then, with the end of the Nine Years' War in Ireland in 1603 and

¹ Most notably visible in D. Gaimster and P. Stamper (eds.), *The Age of Transition* (Oxford, 1997).

the Statutes and Band of Iona in the Isles in 1609.² In 1610 came the Plantation of Ulster, which can as well be seen as a medieval programme of colonisation through village, castle and town as an exercise in the new assertion of power by the English-dominated post-medieval state.

The study of castles lies at the heart of the archaeology of the High and Late Middle Ages, one of the key physical remains of the period and one of the main means of exercising control over resources and people. Studying those castles built at the end of the period of their importance can tell us what was considered useful then; what is left at the end may well be the kernel of their purpose in their earlier manifestations, the reverse of the idea of the 'decline of the castle'. As well as examining castles through their final phase, we can also study them through looking at how they were used by lords outside the society in which they had arisen. Castles in Ireland and western Scotland lay between a heavily Anglicised world and a Gaelic-speaking one, whose lords copied the idea of building them; what they identified in castles as useful is good evidence of what was important to everyone. In the 16th century Ulster represented the heart of the Gaelic-speaking world, closely linked to the similar society of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Dunineny, a site within Gaelic Ulster which could be described in the early 17th century as a castle, was excavated with these issues in mind.

Ballycastle Bay, in Co. Antrim, lies at the eastern end of the north coast of Ireland (Fig. 1). It is bounded to the east by the cliffs culminating in the promontory of Fair Head, some 200 m high, and to the west by a headland of basalt overlying chalk, some 60 m high. The River Margy flows into the bay at its western end and there is a harbour at its mouth, underneath the rising cliffs; in the past this was known as Port Brittas. The headland at the western end of the bay is made up of three lesser promontories: of these the westernmost projects the most and has been cut off by a ditch cut through the basalt rock to make the site of Dunineny (Fig. 2). The ditch defined an irregular, flat area, covered by long, coarse grass, and which appears to have been diminished by cliff-falls especially to the north and west. It has wide views to the north, over the Straights of Moyle to Rathlin Island, and beyond to Kintyre and (on good days) the islands of Islay and Jura. Because of the promontories to its east, however, there is no view into Ballycastle Bay, especially none into its harbour, hidden below the cliffs about half-a-mile from the site. On the landward side, the ground falls steadily away down to the River Tow and the modern centre of Ballycastle. The site of Dunineny lies beside well-drained and probably open land, but exposed to the weather and short of any source of water; excellent as a bolt-hole and as a place to observe movements in the seas to the north, but not as attractive for settlement as the present town.

Dunineny was well known to historians and archaeologists during the 19th and 20th centuries.³ The site was thought to date to the 15th or 16th centuries and to belong to the story of the expansion of the MacDonald (or MacDonnell) lordship in Antrim. This traditionally began at the end of the 14th century when John Mor,

² I. A. Crawford, 'The divide between medieval and post-medieval in Scotland', *Post-Medieval Archaeol.*, 1 (1967), 84-9.

³ Most prominently through G. Hill, *The Macdonnells of Antrim* (Belfast, 1873; repr. 1976). The family name is usually spelled MacDonnell in Ireland, rather than MacDonald as in Scotland.

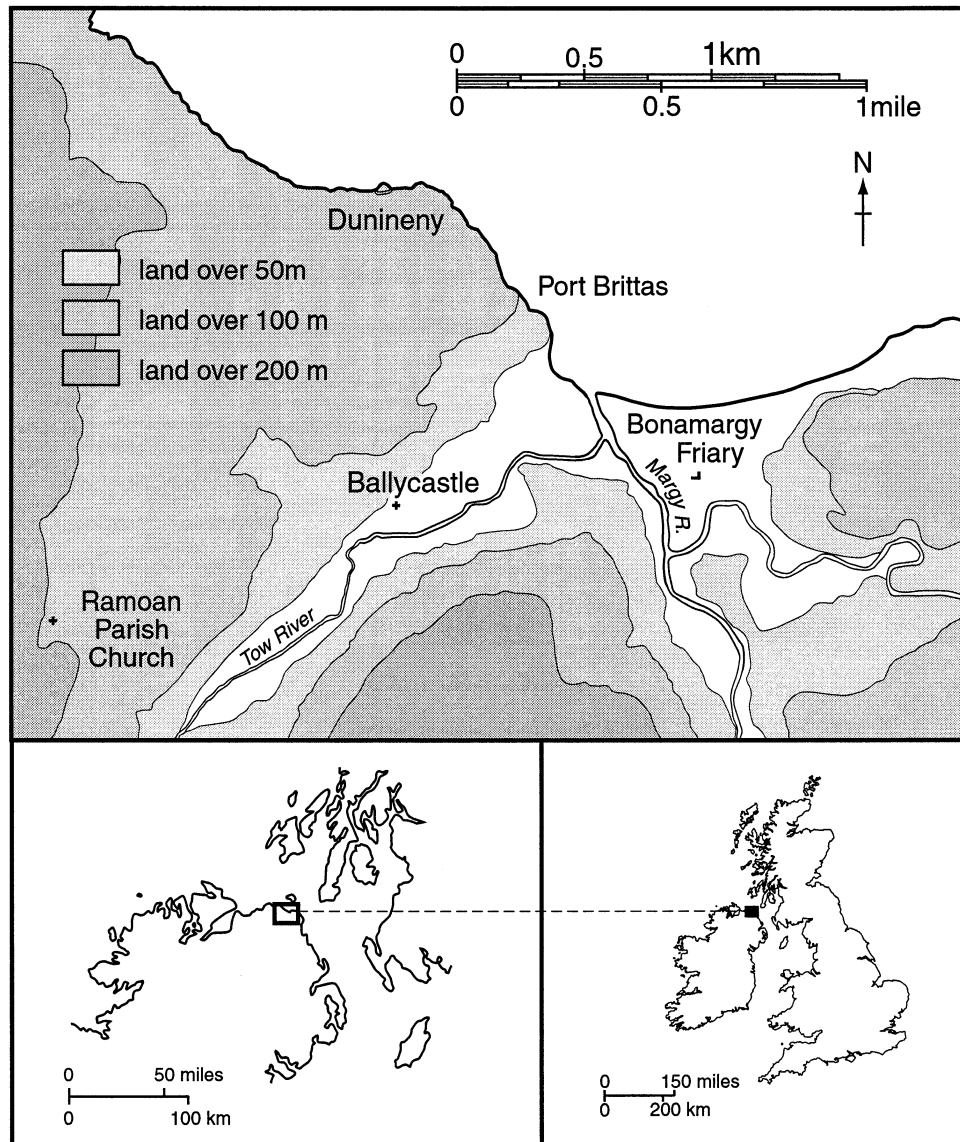


FIG. 1
Dunineny Castle, location.

who was the younger son of John Lord of the Isles and founder of the Clan Ian Mor or Clan Donald South, was said to have married Margaret, heiress to the Byset lordship of the Glens along the eastern coast of Antrim. During the 16th century in particular his descendants expanded their power and lands greatly, at the expense of the MacQuillan lords of the Route and despite the opposition of O'Neills and the forces of the English Crown, into northern Antrim east of the



FIG. 2

The site seen from the sea.

River Bann, compensating for their loss of Islay and Kintyre lands in the aftermath of the break-up of the Lordship of the Isles. MacDonnell expansion culminated in the career of Randal, created first Earl of Antrim in 1620, who in 1603 succeeded in gaining the grant of an enormous estate covering the northern half of the county, which he proceeded to settle with gentry estates and towns.

A brief description and survey of the site was included among other castle sites of the area published in 1983.⁴ This noted both the surviving stone building standing to a height of about 2 m midway along the ditch (Fig. 3), and the traces of other buildings visible beneath the grass of the interior. The upstanding stone building was identified as a gate house because of the gap marked by a draw-bar hole at the outer end, and leading to a passage to the interior. The rough grass surface of the interior was uneven before excavation, but could be seen to be divided into three areas (Fig. 4). The north-eastern half of the site was very uneven, with bumps and ridges apparently marking the lines of walls; to the west, there were the clear outlines of a more or less square building. The south-eastern half was much flatter, but divided by a step into two roughly equal areas. Although the shape of the promontory is very much the same now as was shown on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (surveyed 1832), it is possible that the area of the

⁴ T. E. McNeill, 'The stone castles of northern County Antrim', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 46 (1983), 101–28, esp. 112–14 and fig. 3, with a discussion of the historical background to the region.

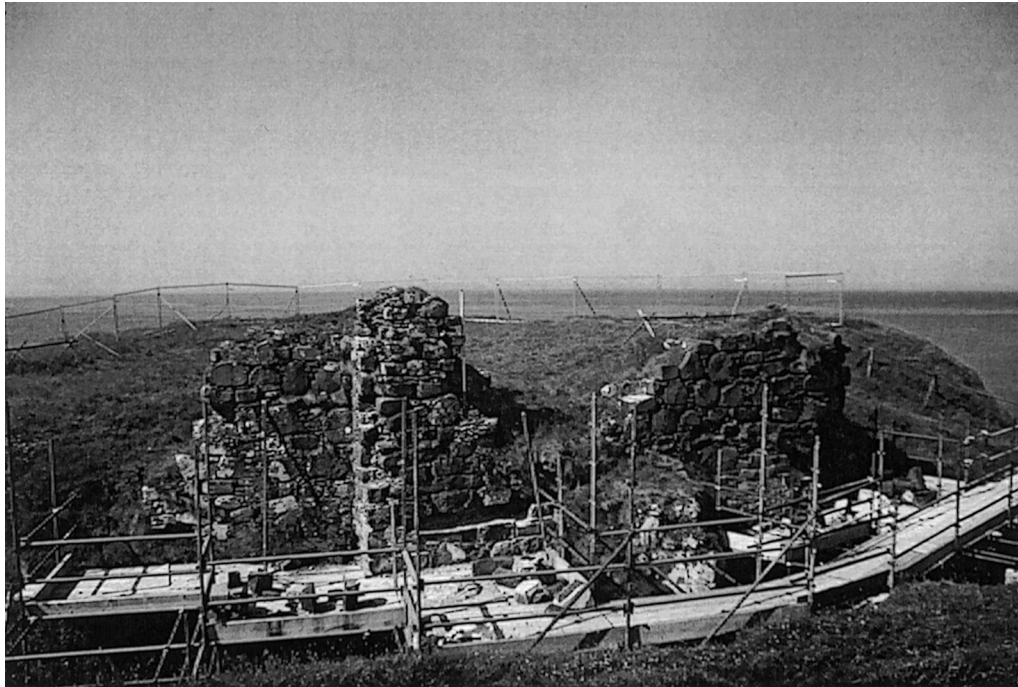


FIG. 3

Dunineny Castle: site and gate structure before excavation.

site has been affected by cliff-falls caused by the instability of the basalt rock; the notch in the south-western cliff certainly looks to be the result of such a fall. Rock projected from both sides of the ditch, showing that it cannot have been wider in the past. On excavation, the underlying basalt rock of the cliff top was found nearly everywhere to be covered by a layer of stiff, yellow-brown clay; only rarely did the rock protrude through the surface of this clay.

The excavation of the site was carried out by the Queen's University of Belfast in partnership with the Environment and Heritage Service of Northern Ireland.⁵ It formed part of the conservation work being done on the upstanding masonry by the Environment and Heritage Service, and research into the nature of lordship in Late-medieval Gaelic society. It was focused on two areas: the perimeter, i.e. the gate structure and the line of the defences (Trenches 1–3) and on the buildings visible through the turf in the interior (Trenches 4–6). Because, as has already been noted, the site does not have a view of the harbour, it was thought that this fitted ill with a site chosen to control sea traffic, as might be expected from a castle of the sea-bound lordship of the MacDonnells. It was therefore possible that it was an earlier site, taken over by the MacDonnells, traces of which might be expected in

⁵ The excavation was carried out on a scheduled ancient monument; in accordance with E.H.S. guidelines no more than 25% of a site, or of a building within the site, could be excavated. It served as the training excavation for the School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology in Queen's University for six weeks in the summer of 2000.

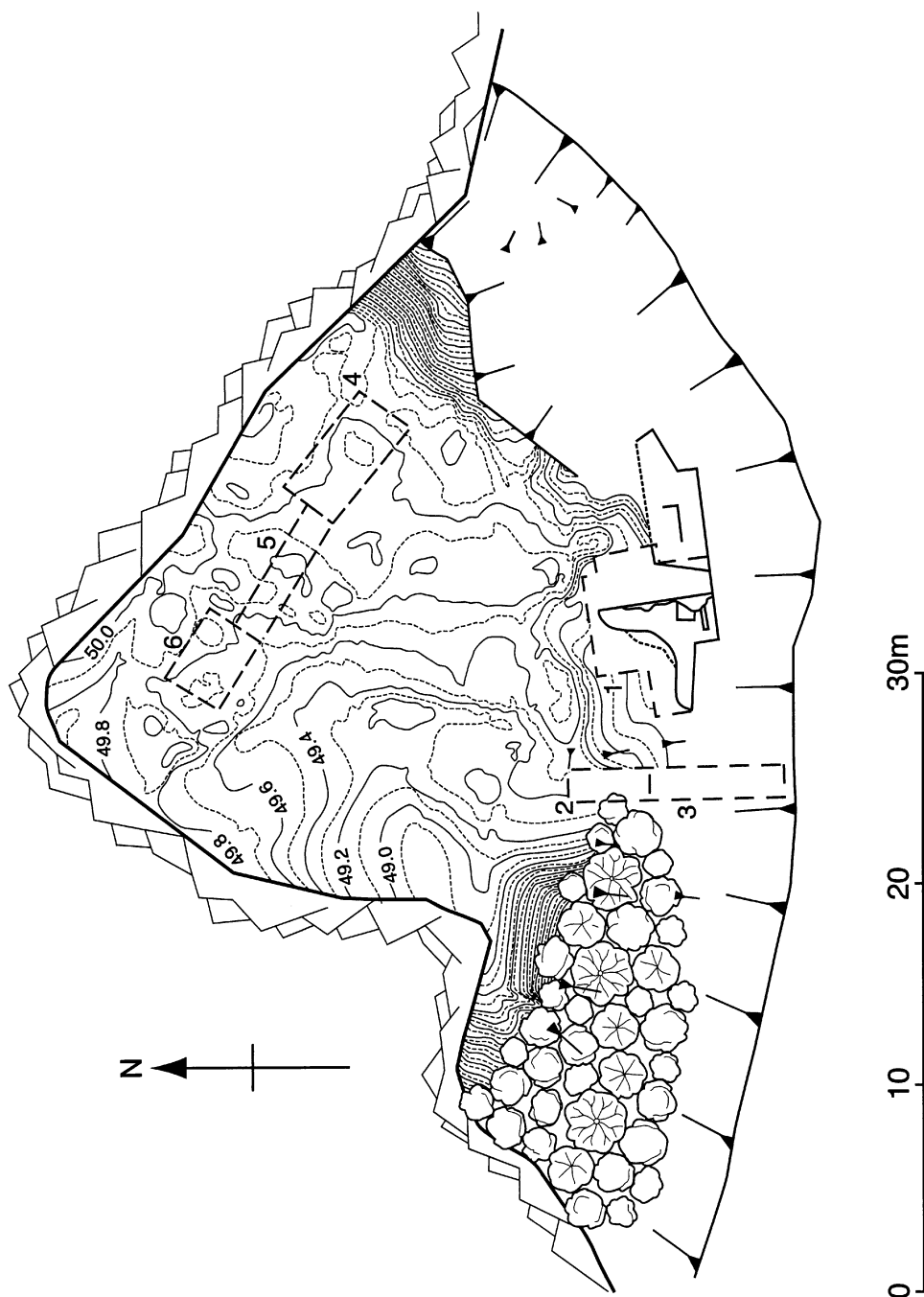


FIG. 4
Site plan with perimeter trenches (1–3) and interior trenches (4–6).

the form of an earlier ditch, reinforced by a bank perhaps. The excavation archive has been deposited with the Environment and Heritage Service.

THE EXCAVATION RESULTS

THE PERIMETER: TRENCHES 1–3

Trench 1 was laid out to examine the gate passage and the western side of the gate structure, assuming that there was a chamber beside the passage. On excavation, the western wall of the passage proved to be longer than the eastern, cutting the trench into two parts, only linked stratigraphically by the section along the northern edge. It was extended twice: to the east to examine the eastern side of the gate passage behind the front wall, and to the south-west to examine the western termination of the southern wall of the gate structure. Trench 2 was excavated in order to cross the expected line of any bank or wall along the inner side of the ditch. Trench 3 was the extension of Trench 2 across the line of the ditch;⁶ it was separately numbered because it was immediately clear that the steepness of the ditch face cut through the natural clay and rock meant that there would be no stratigraphic link between the ditch and Trench 2.

The stratigraphy noted in the trenches of the perimeter area falls into three groups of contexts. The first is that of the earlier contexts in Trenches 1 and 2, which pre-date the construction of the gate structure. In Trench 1 a layer of stiff red-brown clay (contexts 114 and 119) lay directly over the natural yellow-brown clay (Fig. 5): soil analysis (Appendix 1) showed that this was a natural soil over the subsoil, but truncated by having its sod stripped off. A similar layer of orange-brown clay soil (context 205) lay over the natural clay in Trench 2 and the two may be equated. Across the centre and northern half of Trench 2 a pile of large stones up to half-a-metre across (context 206) lay on this truncated soil (Fig. 6). Along the top of this pile was a shallow and irregular hollow or scoop, without steep or well-defined edges (context 210) filled with dark earth (context 204). Against and over the stones to the north lay context 203, brown earth c. 200 mm thick; its upper surface was not well sealed from the modern topsoil, as was shown by the finding in it of half of a stoneware marmalade pot, the rest of which was found in the modern topsoil down the slope of the ditch. At the south end of the trench, between the stones and the lip of the ditch, was a narrow berm on which was found context 209, a dump of pink clay parallel to the line of the stones. In section (Fig. 12), the stones and context 203 have every appearance of being the remains of a truncated bank, lying within the line of the ditch; the hollow, context 210, might be the degraded remains of the emplacement for a form of timber superstructure; the clay (context 209) possibly slumped cladding. The situation, found in Trench 2, of a line of stones and brown earth lying on the truncated earliest soil, was repeated along the northern end of Trench 1, with a line of large stones and brown earth (contexts 115; eastern half of the trench; and 123; western half). In plan, these stones continue the line of those of context 204 in Trench 2.

⁶ Trench 3 of this report, the section through the ditch, was called Trench 2ext[ension] on site, and is so numbered in the archive.

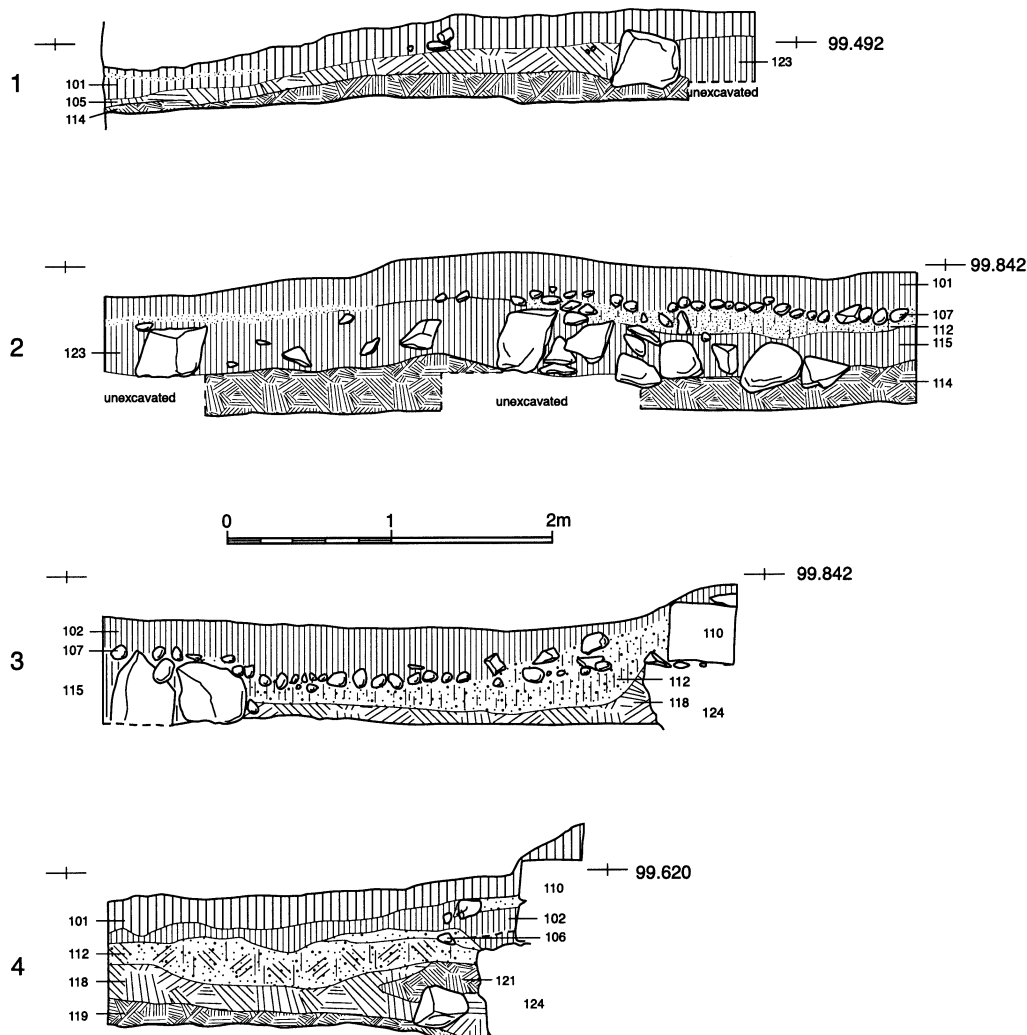


FIG. 5
Sections of Trench 1.

In Trench 1 a deposit of grey clay (context 118 east of the later gate structure; context 105 west of it) was found against the front of the large stones (115/123, Fig. 5). The soil analysis of this grey clay (Appendix 1) demonstrated that it resulted from the consolidation of a pile of turves, thicker and less disturbed to the east; in the western half of the trench it sloped gradually down from a thickness of c. 200 mm where it was cut by the trench for the later gate structure to less than half this thickness to the south, being almost absent in the south-west extension of the trench. There it lay directly on the red-brown clay (context 114) filling a shallow east-west step (context 113) in it, but 'has been significantly disrupted' (Appendix 1). The soil analysis demonstrated that the turves, which composed the pile, had

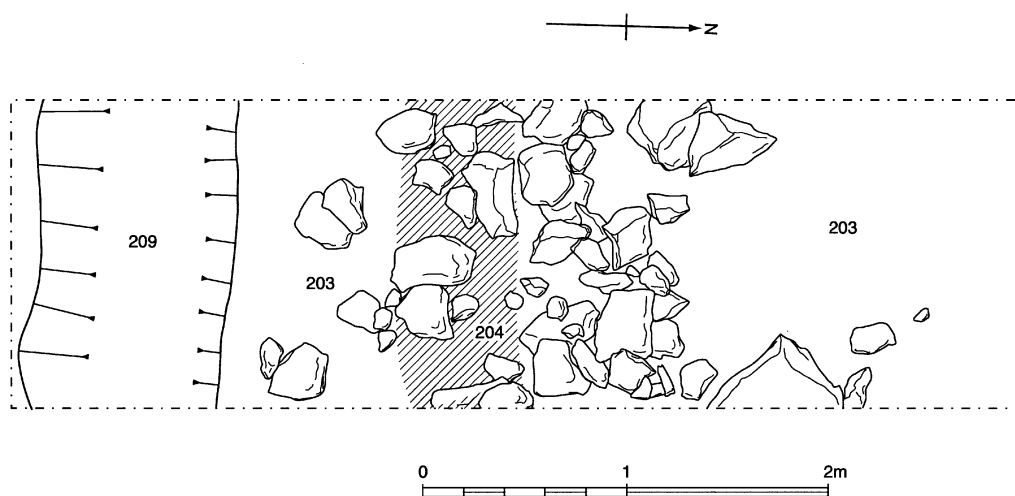


FIG. 6

Plan of Trench 2 showing stones of the possible bank.

not been dug on the site because they came from damp soil without the basalt fragments of the truncated soil below and that they had been there for a considerable period, allowing them to decay to a stable formation, before the construction of the gate structure on top of the clay.

Any interpretation of these contexts is based on certain assumptions. The pile of turves was clearly related to the stones (115 and 123) against which it lay in Trench 1. We may go further and equate the stones and earth in the Trench 2 (context 206) with those of 115/123. If we accept that, then we would be proposing that they are the degraded remains of a single bank, with a pile of turves, derived from land some distance from the structure, in front of its central portion. Five sherds of pottery were recovered from the stones and earth (context 203) in Trench 2. Of these, three were of Late-medieval everted-rim ware, while two were late prehistoric in date. In front of the bank and the pile of turves lay a ditch.

The surface of the decayed pile of turves, by then converted to clay, was the level from which the masonry gate structure was constructed. The gate was built on a raft of stones and mortar (context 124), which was laid in a trench cut into the clay and linked the two parts of the structure, on either side of the gate passage. The raft was built in an irregular T-shaped plan (Figs. 7–8), anticipating the plan of the gate to be built, which must have been decided beforehand. It was constructed of rubble laid in a plentiful amount of white mortar. There was something of a N.–S. division visible in it, marked by a step (context 122) filled with looser material, while to the east there were more large stones visible on the surface. It is possible that the raft was built in two stages, but the mortar was the same on both sides and it bonded along the northern edge of the step: the ‘break’ is unlikely to be more than a pause between two days’ work.

The gate structure was constructed with a core of rough angular rubble set in plentiful amounts of hard white mortar which bonded with the raft. The structure

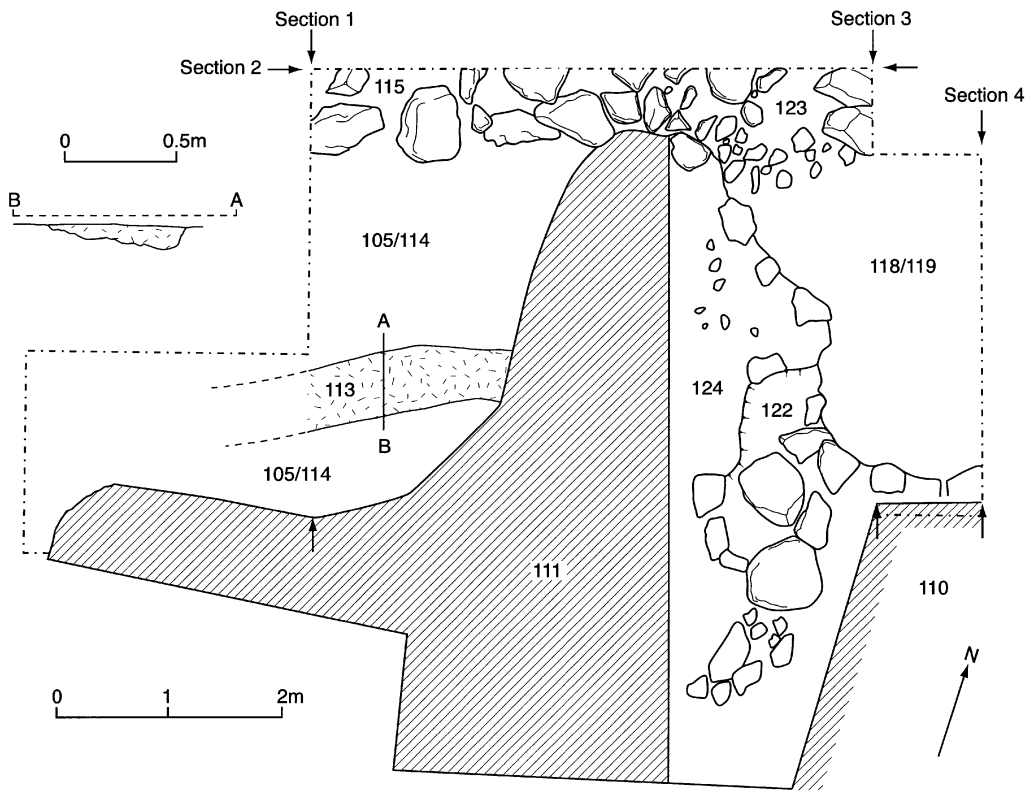


FIG. 7

Plan of the gate-structure foundation raft.

as built is undoubtedly an odd one (Fig. 8). It is in three parts, the gate passage and the walls on either side; the gate position itself is shown by a draw-bar hole in the western side. The sides of the gate passage and the south faces of the two southern walls, facing the ditch and the land approaches to the site, were faced with regular, coursed rectangular basalt blocks, interspersed with multangular 'Giant's Causeway' stones of columnar basalt set on edge as a decorative feature (Fig. 3); much of this facing above ground level had been robbed.

The E. wall (context 110) presents its best front to the outer side; some 5 m from the entrance gap it is set back 900 mm and then runs at an angle for a further 2 m to the north-east, where it appears to be roughly broken off. It was only examined through excavation at its eastern end along the gate passage, where it is about 2.6 m wide. In plan, the end was not at right angles to the main, southern face, but angled to splay inwards towards the interior of the site. Above the present ground level an internal face is visible about 1.07 m in from the outer face of the wall; this face terminates at a right angle and the length of neither side of this feature can be seen. Excavation along the end of the wall showed no break in it which might have communicated with this feature, as would be expected, for



FIG. 8

Gate-structure foundation raft viewed from the north.

example, if it had been an internal stair. If it did link through to the end of the wall, it did so at a level at least 400 mm above the contemporary ground level.

The W. part of the structure (context 111) is quite different. The S. face runs only 2.4 m west of the entrance gap before it is set back 1.2 m; from there it continues for 2.65 m, angled to the north-west. Two features were visible before excavation. The draw-bar hole already noted was set about 1 m above the original ground level, with its outer face only 400 mm behind the south face of the outer wall. It is set at approximately the same level as a niche visible in the thickness of the wall about a metre down the gate passage. Before excavation, the inner sides of the western structure showed a rough face which was corbelled out as though it were a collapsed vault. It was assumed that these sides had also been robbed of their facing stones, remains of which would be discovered in the excavation, and that at least the foundations of a rear and western side wall should be discovered.

Excavation led to a number of discoveries about the western part of the structure. Towards the interior of the site, the W. wall ran 5.8 m along the side of the entrance passage which was therefore longer on the west than the east. There was no good finish on the two inner sides of the E. or S. walls; the rough face of the foundation carried on unchanged up above ground level and the corbelled overhang on the inner side was both unsupported and unfaced. More surprisingly, neither the S. nor the E. wall was broken off at the end. The masonry had the mortar smoothed off, with no holes for lost bonding stones and the foundation trench (cut into the grey clay context 105 at the north end of the wall) did not

continue beyond the end of the existing walls (Fig. 9). It is clear that the structure which was built was, in plan, essentially the structure that survived to the present day, which means that there was no rear or side wall to the W. part. There was no room on the E. side of the passage, let alone a tower; instead the gate structure was only a façade towards the outside of the castle and the gate passage. Only the surface of the grey clay (context 105) formed the 'floor' east of the passage.

The gate, which was only some 1.10 m wide, led in to a cobbled passage between the two parts of the structure (Figs. 10–11). The cobbles (context 107, set in mixed earth, context 112) were carefully chosen of uniform chalk beach pebbles, perhaps taken up from the base of the cliffs to the west of the site, where there is still a bank of them to be found. Down the middle of the passage, flat stones (context 108) were inlaid into the cobbles to make a drain to carry surface water down through the gate into the ditch. North-east of this, the cobbles showed a drop in level along the line of the edge of the foundation raft. At the outer, southern end, the matrix of context 112 was thinner over the raft and the cobbles had been lost over time. At the very front of the passage, it was possible that there were sockets for the timber beams of a bridge support. As Figure 7 shows there were two holes on either side of a single stone set below the level of the raft and cobbling. However, the central stone which divided and framed these holes was lying loose where it was found and was not mortared into that position; it is not certain that it is *in situ*. Likewise, it was possible that there were sockets for a frame for the gate visible in the stonework in either side wall, but it was difficult to be sure whether these are the settings for a lost wooden frame or simply sockets where stones have fallen out.

The pattern of the cobbling was interesting (Fig. 11). North of the E. wall, when the trench was extended, we expected to find that the cobbles ran up to the N. face of the wall. In fact they did not; instead they ended along a line continuing the angle of the end of the wall. The point of this seems to have been to cobble all the gate passage and interior visible from the lip of the ditch outside the site, but only that. To the east the level of the cobbles was continued by the surface of context 112, the matrix laid down to support them. At the N. end of the trench, the cobbles continued, along the line of the gate passage. To the west, however, they quickly ran out around the end of the wall 111. In both areas, east and west, where the cobbles had not been laid stones were left protruding from the surface of the layers. This, combined with the state of the clay when wet, makes it look as though neither surface was intended to support people crossing it regularly. Traffic was restricted to the cobbled area.

Debris from the collapse or destruction of the gate structure was found lying directly on all three of the surfaces around it although the greatest bulk of this, context 106, was on the cobbles in the gate passage. It consisted of a mixture of quite small angular stones and decayed mortar; there were no large stones and none from the wall facings. It seems that this was the debris left over from the deliberate dismantling and removal of the best wall material rather than the product of natural decay. It also appeared as though this material came down on the surfaces not long after they had been laid down; it might have been expected that some soil would have built up on them, especially the clay or earth ones as opposed to the cobbles which could have been kept clear. Outside, along the ditch,



FIG. 9

Northern end of the foundations of the W. wall of the gate structure, viewed from the south-west, showing how it was built against the large stones to the north and cut through the grey clay of context 105.



FIG. 10

View of the gate passage from the north.

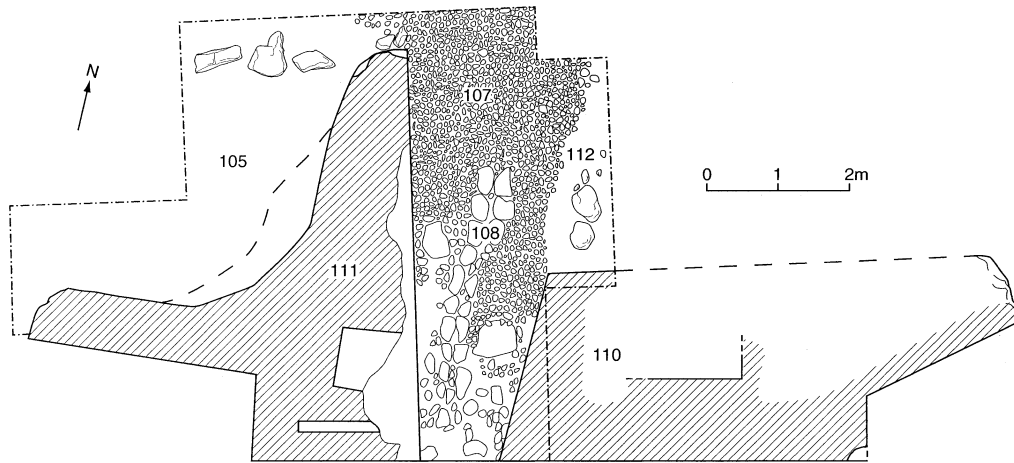


FIG. 11

Plan of the gate structure.

the walls were deeply undermined, probably as part of the same process of demolition. This was presumably for the building material; damage in war or otherwise would have left the good stones there along with the rubbish.

Artefacts from the gate structure were few. From among the cobbles of the gate passage came the bowl of one clay pipe (Fig. 18: 107-2) and a fragment of the stem of another. Pressed into the (disturbed) grey clay where it was thin and served as the surface west of the gate came a part of the stem of a third pipe. A rim sherd of everted-rim ware came from the lowest destruction debris in the gate passage (Fig. 18: 106-21). The topsoil of the passage contained a series of modern artefacts, such as a corkscrew, indicative of people sheltering there or having picnics to enjoy the view.

The third group of contexts found in the perimeter trenches were those of the lower fill of the ditch (Fig. 12). The ditch itself was some 6 m deep and markedly flat-bottomed where it was sectioned in Trench 3. Basalt rock projected out from the outer face of the ditch at that point at less than a metre below the surface; the inner face when cleaned showed the junction between rock and natural clay a little lower. The basalt rock has numerous fault lines, both vertical and horizontal, and at least one band of soft, crumbling rock, so that the ditch diggers could prise out the rock in blocks, sometimes leaving an overhang. The lowest five contexts (217, 219 and 220-2), mixtures of rock fragments and clay, appear to be the product of the natural accumulation of organic material in the ditch base, with a little erosion of the sides. On top of these were then dumped the results of a fire: context 216 which was composed of some 80% finely fragmented burnt daub; 213, a charcoal-stained clay soil, again with fragments of burnt daub; and 215, a layer of charcoal and fine burnt daub fragments like orange sand. From these lower levels came a dozen sherds of everted-rim ware; from the lowest levels (219 and 221 respectively) came a clay pipe bowl (Fig. 18: 219-53) and stem and a piece of slipware from context 216. From 217 came a piece of melted lead, which, like the burnt daub,

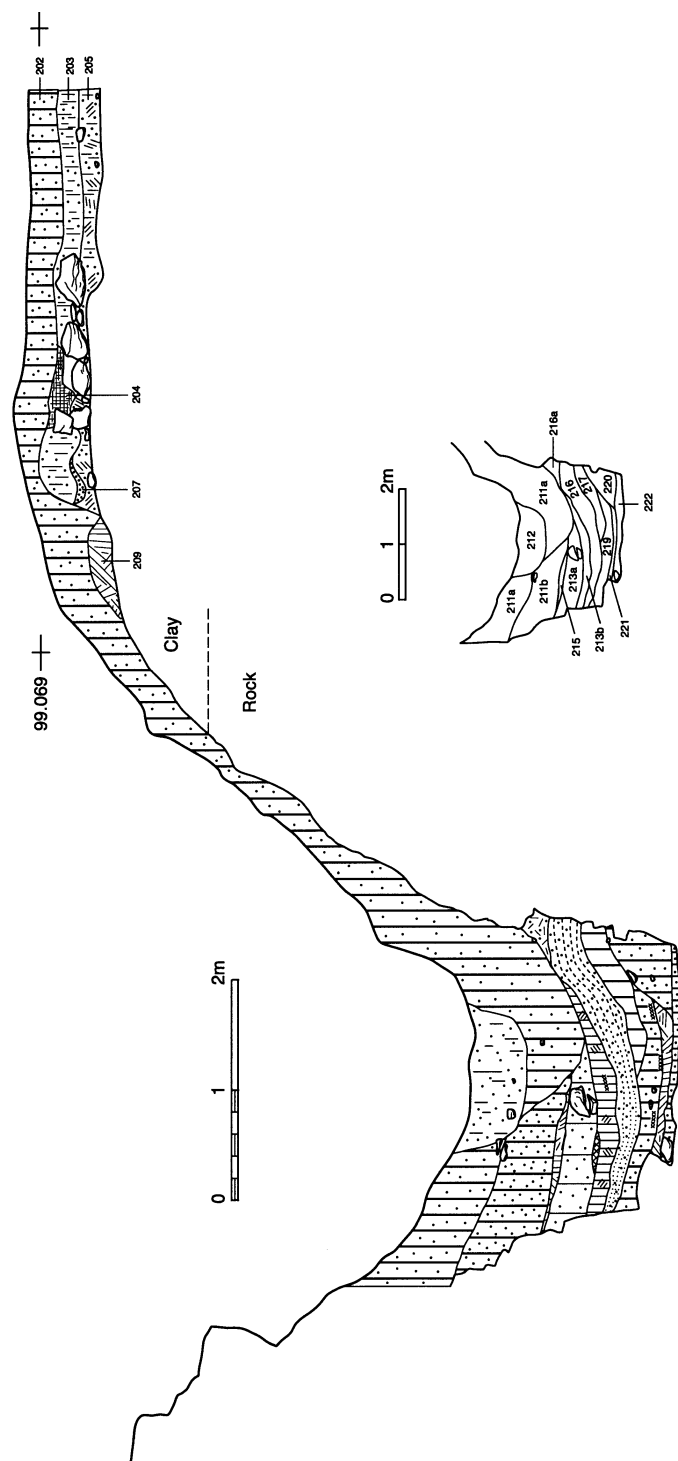


FIG. 12

Section through the ditch (Trench 3) and the west side of Trench 2.

may be linked to clearing after a timber building had caught fire, such as will be noted in the interior. The clay-pipe fragments and the pottery show that the ditch in its present form was excavated as late as the 17th century. Above the highest of these destruction layers, the ditch had filled with soils derived from the sides; the latest context, 212, was the fill of a cut along the ditch, apparently made to get earth for the bank on the ditch lip: it can hardly have been for drainage.

Although the ditch in its present form was late, this is probably the result of a re-cutting. The flat bottom and near vertical lower sides looked as though they had been made as a result of quarrying the basalt for stone, presumably for the gate structure. Above the level of the top of contexts 216 and 213a, the sides of the ditch were less vertical and this may mark the base of an earlier ditch, later deepened as a quarry. An earlier ditch could be connected with the bank of stones and earth and, therefore, with the pile of turves in front of it. However, the bank and the ditch do not follow each other in plan. The bank runs in a more or less straight, E.-W. line, but the ditch swings out to the south where the later gate structure was built. This left an area between the bank to the north and the ditch, which appears to have been filled with the pile of turves.

THE INTERIOR: TRENCHES 4-6

Before excavation, the outlines of one building within the interior were clear, and Trench 6 was laid out to examine its NE. quadrant including a depression which apparently marked a doorway in its SE. wall. Further to the south-east the remains of a second building might be made out, although they were much less clear than the first. Trench 4 was laid out to examine this building, with Trench 5 linking the stratigraphy of the other two trenches. The natural surface was the same yellow-brown clay as in the perimeter trenches, but with the natural basalt rock showing. The excavated remains in this area belonged to two periods. The features of the first were either dug into, or laid directly on, the surface of the natural clay; those of the second were separated from the first group by a layer of clay.

The earlier phase was marked by three features found to the west of Trench 6 (Fig. 13: contexts 333, 337 and 347) which were identified as small post-holes by the dark clay fill with stones wedged around the sides; in plan they formed a line. Both 333 and 337 were at the edges of shallow hollows in the natural clay; the filling of 333 could be seen in section to have been cut into it. The posts represented by this line of features were only c. 150 mm across and sunk into the natural clay only c. 200 mm or less, but they nonetheless seem to represent a flimsy structure. There were two cuts into the surface of the natural clay in Trench 5, 348 and 352, both quite small. The fill of 348 (context 349) was a dark clay earth indistinguishable from the clay surface above it. The fill of 352 (351) was made up of an upper layer of wet charcoal over a layer of dark, charcoal-stained clay. Although both of these features were of roughly similar shape and dimensions to the post-holes of Trench 6, they lacked the packing stones which would make their identification as post-holes reasonably sure. Apart from the possibility that the lower part of the scoops of the two hearths of a later period, 326 and 353, might have destroyed anything, the rest of the trench was blank.

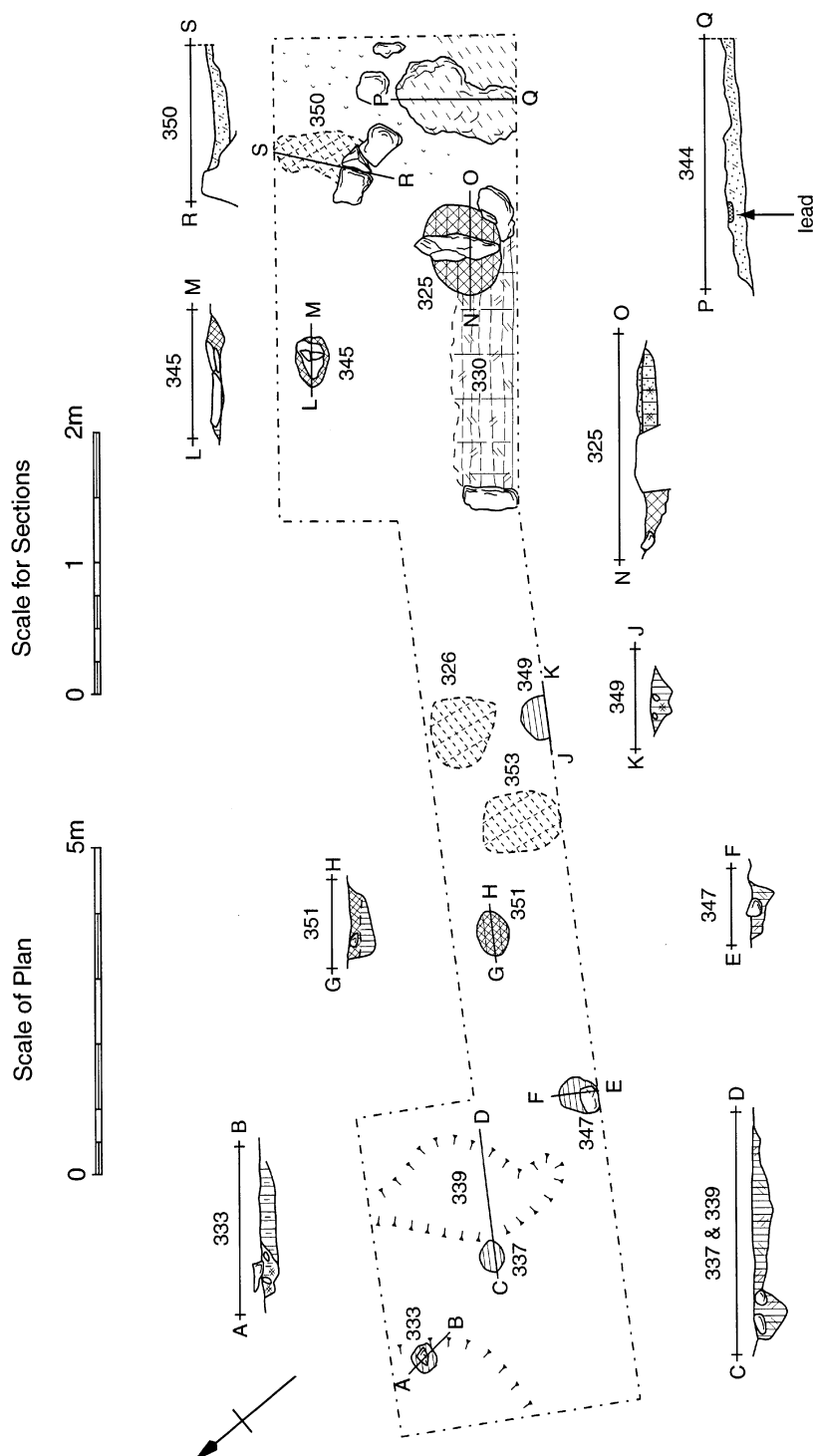


FIG. 13
Plan of Trenches 4-6, showing earlier structures cut into the natural clay.

In Trench 4, context 345 was a shallow scoop filled with flat stones, possibly an emplacement for a vertical timber. Context 325 was a hearth, hollowed out of the clay on either side of one outcrop rock and beside another: the W. part was filled with 336, black ash; the E. part with mixed dark earth (335) under a thin layer of red, burnt soil (334). There were other deposits of red ash and soil, presumably from this or other hearths: in the hollow north of a third outcrop of rock, 350, and context 344, in the SE. corner, lying directly over the natural rock. The shallow hollow, 330, to the south of the trench was filled with a mixture of brown earth and clay; it is as likely to have been the result of water accumulating in a hollow in the natural clay as a man-made feature. The third of the trench east of contexts 325 and 350 was notable for coming down on to the eroding surface of the basalt rock, moving through gravel to the firmer rock beneath.

The remains may be explained as at least one light timber structure and a hearth. Finds were few: from the fill of context 351 came a lead musket ball (with two others, one of which had the sprue from its casting still preserved, from context 319, part of the clay layer that sealed these features) while in the burnt soil of context 344 was found a lump of fused lead, presumably the product of activity in the nearby hearth. This might also explain the presence, in context 329, which lay over 330 beside the hearth, of a small lump of porphyry (an igneous rock with clearly visible crystals of feldspar from Cushendun, Co. Antrim: identified by Dr. A. Ruffell)⁷: this is a heavy, shiny stone which may have been collected as a potential ore.

All the contexts noted above were covered by a layer of clay soil, usually stained dark by charcoal, which separates them from the second group of contexts (Fig. 14: A, B, C and D). This layer ran up to and over context 344 in Trench 4; in the S. section of the trench it could be distinguished as two layers: the dark clay of context 318 with the lighter material of context 324 below. The dark clay surface of context 318 merged with that of 319 in Trench 5, which in turn was recorded as 323 west of wall 322 in the same trench. This also merged with the surface, context 321, in Trench 6, where it filled the holes 333, 337 and 347. These contexts were all part of a deliberate attempt to level the site over the whole of the excavated area. Mostly this consisted of filling up hollows or cuts, but in the south-east of Trench 4 it meant levelling the burnt soil, context 344. As well as being visible as two layers in Trench 4, this layer was quite variable in thickness and should be seen as laid down deliberately rather than as a natural soil.

The foundations of two buildings were set on this surface (Fig. 15). In Trench 4 the wall of a building, context 313, was built of rough angular rubble of basalt held together with a plentiful amount of poor quality mortar (Fig. 16). The wall was about 700 mm wide and stood to a maximum height of c. 800 mm; towards the top the mortar gave way to brown earth, either because of decay or because in the upper courses it had been bonded with clay. Some 2 m along the northern wall it came to a neat end and was replaced by a layer of cobbles set in earth (context 309). The cobbles were edged on the south by two slabs of roughly dressed stone set almost flush with the surface of 318; the stone was an unfinished sandstone

⁷ School of Geography, Queen's University of Belfast.

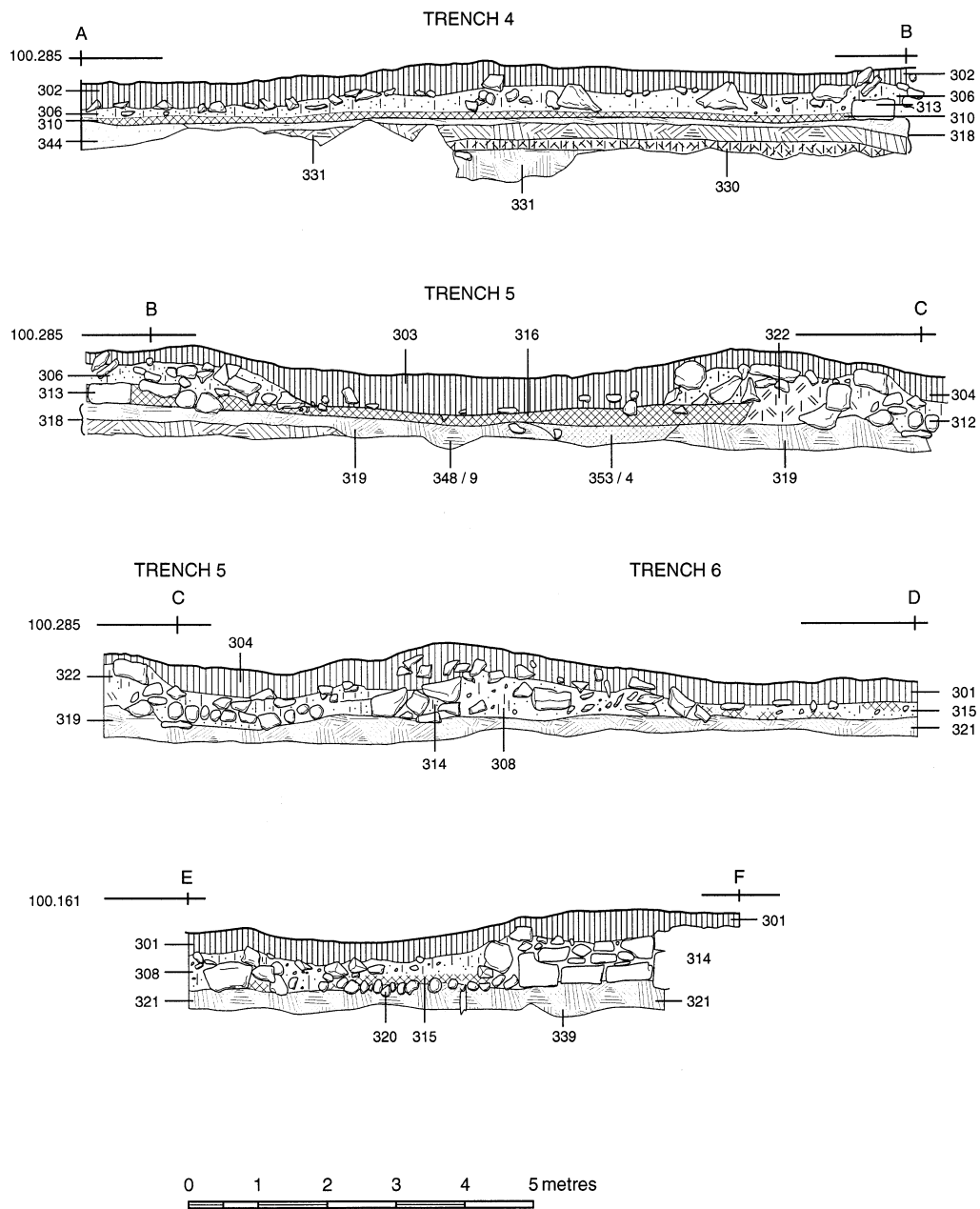


FIG. 14

Sections of Trenches 4-6.

window-sill which had cracked during dressing. East of this the wall had been robbed, leaving only a thin layer of mortar and small stones. At the south-western corner of the trench the NW. wall was also finished to give way to a second flat

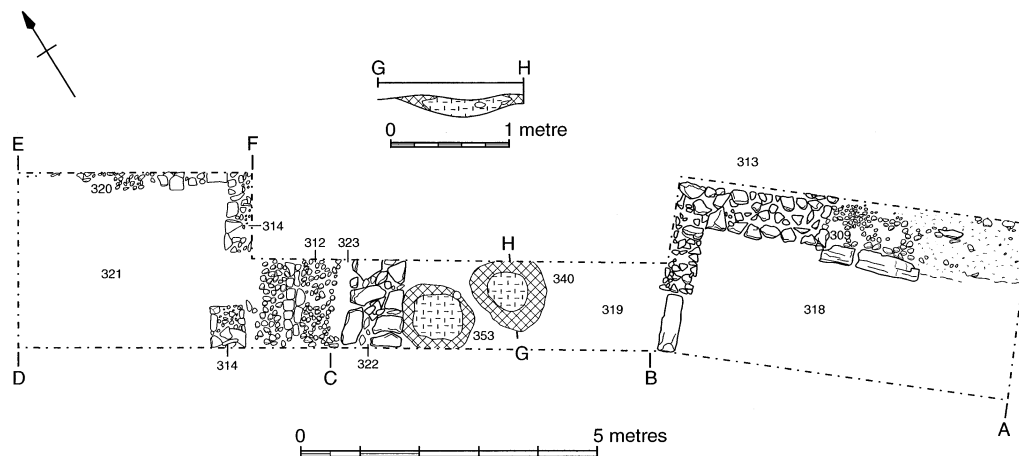


FIG. 15

Plan of later structures in Trenches 4-6.

stone set flush with the floor. Although there were no traces of the emplacements for a door frame in the floor or in the walling at the sides, the gaps must have been for doors; the sandstone slabs acting as thresholds. The surface of context 318 served as the floor of the building.

There were four features either laid upon, or dug into the surface of context 319/321 in Trench 5. A wall, context 322, of large stones with some clay bonding but essentially dry-stone in construction, ran across the trench towards the western end. Close to the east of the wall were two circular hearths c. 1.25 m across (contexts 340 and 353), set in shallow hollows without any revetment or structure; they were filled with clay and ash burned red within a circle of charcoal-stained clay. West of the dry-stone wall, and parallel to it, was a path, context 312, made of chalk cobbles with a central drain like those of the gate passage. Just west of the path was the wall, context 314, of the squarish building which had been visible before the excavation began, and which returned along the north side of Trench 6 (Fig. 17). As with the building in Trench 4, there were two gaps in the walls; the one in the N. wall marked by a threshold of cobbles, context 320 and the other, in the W. wall, without a threshold but with both jambs neatly finished. The floor of the room was the surface of context 321 which ran below the wall to link up with context 319 on which the cobbled path was laid.

The surfaces of contexts 318 and 319, in Trenches 4 and 5, were covered by a layer of charcoal and burnt clay, with lumps of burnt daub recognisable and some fragments of carbonised wattles. Some of the lumps of daub were large enough to preserve the imprint of the wood on which it had been plastered. One of the imprints was of a piece of squared timber at least 35 mm wide; the rest were of wattles c. 15 mm in diameter.⁸ Some charcoal lay on the surface of context 321,

⁸ 15 mm is also the mean diameter of hazel wattles from Anglo-Norman Dublin structures: A. O'Sullivan, 'Woodmanship and the supply of underwood and timber to Anglo-Norman Dublin', 59-69 in C. Manning (ed.), *Dublin and Beyond the Pale* (Dublin, 1998), 63-4.



FIG. 16

Building in Trench 4, viewed from the north-west.

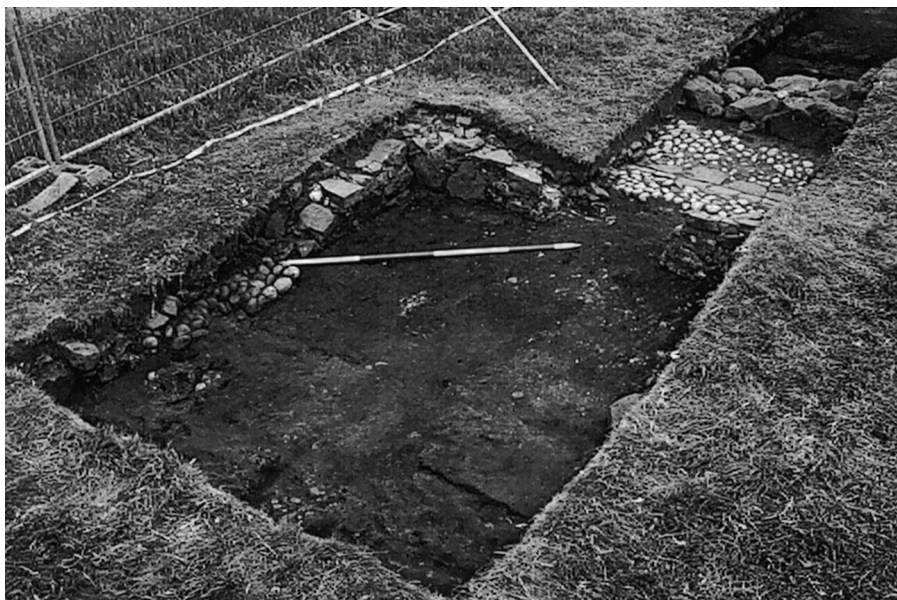


FIG. 17

Building in Trench 6, viewed from the south-west; cobbled path and dry-stone wall visible through the door in the SE. wall.

within the western of the two buildings, but W. of wall 322 it did not form the same defined layer as it did to the east. On top of the charcoal in Trenches 5 and 6, was a layer of stone and mortar tumbled from the walls, but this was less evident in Trench 4. Above this again was the recent topsoil.

The remains were those of two substantial buildings: the one in Trench 4 measured at least 6 m by 3 internally, while the one in Trench 6 was at least 5 m by 4 internally. In fact, to judge from the remains visible in the grass outside the trenches, each building was considerably larger, perhaps 6 m by 8 and 6 m sq respectively. The remains still *in situ* and of their destruction debris show that they were built of timber framing with wattle and daub infill on low stone footings. The stone walls were both too thin and too poorly built, in their laying-out, fabric and lack of foundations, to have supported buildings with 6-m spans; nor was there a great quantity of stone debris. The building in Trench 4 certainly burned down; it is tempting to attribute this event to the presence of two open-air hearths only 2 and 3 metres to the west. Perhaps the wall 322 which separated off the hearths from Trench 6 saved the latter building from burning rather than collapse. The path which led past its eastern door presumably went to the gate, and may have been a continuation of its line of white chalk cobbles across the whole castle yard. There were again few artefacts from the buildings: four sherds of everted-rim ware, two small sherds of slip ware, a fragment of glass bottle and two of window glass; a fragment of clay-pipe stem came from the clay floor.

PERIODS AND DATES FROM ARCHAEOLOGY

The excavations uncovered remains of five separate groups of contexts: three in the perimeter and two in the interior, apart from the recent topsoils. Table 1 summarises the finding of datable artefacts in the context groups from the

TABLE 1
OCCURRENCE OF ARTEFACTS IN CONTEXTS OTHER THAN TOPSOIL.

* Joins with one sherd from context 220. ¶ Illustrated in Figure 18.

Artefact-type	Bank and turf mound	Lower interior occupation	Clay floor below timber frame	Timber- frame buildings	Gate structure	Lower- ditch infills
Prehistoric pot	203 (2)¶	—	—	—	—	—
Everted-rim ware pot	203 (3)	324 (1)	—	316 (5)¶	106 (1)¶	216 (5)¶ 217 (4) 219 (1)*
Musket ball	—	351 (1)	319 (2)	—	—	—
Lead castings	—	344	—	—	—	217
Clay pipe	—	—	321 (1)	—	105 (1) 107 (2)¶	219 (1)¶ 221 (1)
Window glass	—	—	324 (2)	313 316 (1) 317 (1)	—	219 (2)

excavations. The first numbers are those of the individual contexts with the figure in brackets being the number of items found there.

The table reveals two things: the remarkable paucity of artefacts from the site, and the pattern of discovery. The masonry gate-structure, timber-frame buildings in the interior and the lower fills of the ditch produced the same mix of clay-pipe fragments, everted-rim and slip-ware sherds, and must be given the same 17th-century date; the lower ditch infills are also connected to the timber-frame buildings by the presence of quantities of burnt daub. The path east of the western building was made of the same chalk beach cobbles, with a central drain of slabs as the gate passage. This allows us to connect these structures to give a picture of final period of the site's use, in the 17th century. In front was a gate structure with a carefully finished passage (designed to impress the outsider) but no rear or side walls. This was not flanked by any curtain wall, nor probably even by a bank, but it was fronted by a ditch. The ditch as it was found clearly dates to this period, but it is unlikely to have been dug from new. The effort required to excavate a ditch 6 m deep through rock sits most uneasily with the failure to provide a wall continuing the line of the gate structure. It is much more likely to have consisted of a ditch which was deepened as much as a quarry as a line of defence, to provide stone for the 17th-century buildings. The space behind the gate to judge from the visible, but unexcavated, traces of walls was organised into two areas. To the south was an open yard, where there are no traces of buildings visible above ground but which is apparently divided by the N.-S. step. North of this appears to be a wall running E.-W. across the site; midway along it a mound and a hole seem to mark the site of a gate with robbed pillars. Behind the wall lay the remains of two substantial timber-framed buildings separated by a dry-stone wall. West of the dry-stone wall was a path leading from the inner gate past the eastern door of the square building in Trench 6. East of the dry-stone wall was a further yard with the building of Trench 4 and at least two large outside hearths.

The finds of artefacts and bones confirm this picture of a site which was pre-eminently the façade of a castle. Buildings destroyed by fire normally produce plentiful quantities of artefacts, but the total amount (other than finds dating to the last 100 years from the topsoil) from the whole site amounted to 26 pot sherds, 6 fragments of clay pipes, 3 musket balls and some melted lead fragments: even assuming that rubbish was thrown over the cliff this is remarkably sparse (Fig. 18). The bone evidence was more telling (Appendix 3). The cattle bones (which made up the great majority of the bones found) were predominantly from heads and lower limbs of the beasts: the poorer meat cuts. Many of the bones had been cut up for stew or to extract the marrow. Although the smaller numbers of sheep and pig bones were less obviously from poor cuts, Dunineny was clearly not a site of lordly residence; both interior buildings and the perimeter were sampled.

Before the masonry and timber-frame buildings were erected there was a period of occupation in the interior which consisted of slightly built timber buildings and at least one hearth, probably used for melting lead, and possibly for casting musket balls. This activity dates it to the 16th century. This leaves the remains of what has been interpreted as a bank with a mound of turves set prominently in front of it, but inside the line of a ditch. Both the dating and the

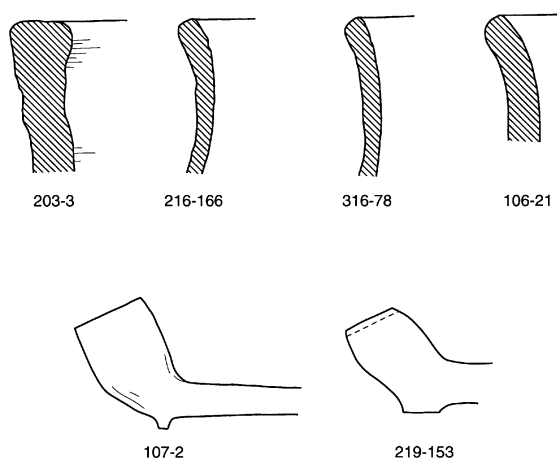


FIG. 18
Everted-rim sherds and clay-pipe bowls found
at Dunineny Castle.

structures of this period are problematic. The sherds found in the bank material are both Late-medieval and prehistoric; the earth of the bank was not clearly sealed. The simplest solution would be to equate the bank with the earlier, slight timber buildings and hearths. Although it is difficult to point to a precise parallel for this, it would fit well with the sort of timber and turf structure which might well have been erected during the Tudor wars in Ireland; the turf mound would have acted as a bastion in front of the wall, a firing place for musketeers. On this basis, we might identify the whole as the work of the small garrison posted to Dunineny in 1584–5.

The soil analysis contradicts this identification, however. It points to a considerable interval between the construction of the masonry and the decay of the turves of the mound into which it was inserted. The turves were also apparently not dug from the soil of the headland, as they would have been by soldiers fortifying an outpost. Nor is it easy to see how a small garrison, such as was in place in 1584–5, would have hewn out a rock-cut ditch some 50 m long. If we accept the pre-existence in 1584 of a site with a bank, ditch and mound, it must date to some considerably earlier period than the 16th century, and to have been abandoned long before 1584. Dating this must rely on the worst of reasoning, *ex silentio*. The only ceramics found on the site are either Late-medieval everted-rim ware or post-medieval tobacco pipes and slip ware. Occupation earlier than this would be expected to produce at least some sherds of fully medieval date, or else the earlier medieval souterrain ware. During the latter period the nearby forts of Doonmore or Larrybane produced great quantities (at least by Irish standards) of this pottery,⁹ as does every site, such as ringforts, occupied between the 9th and 12th centuries in eastern Ulster. Any occupation site in eastern Ulster which produces little or no pottery should date to the 8th century A.D. or earlier. This could mean either the

⁹ V. G. Childe, 'Doonmore, a castle mound near Fair Head, Co. Antrim', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 1 (1938), 122–35; V. B. Proudfoot and B. C. S. Wilson, 'Further excavations at Larrybane promontory fort', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 24–25 (1961–2), 91–115.

late prehistoric period (as hinted at by the two sherds of Late Bronze-age pottery), or the earliest medieval times.

CONTEXT AND DISCUSSION

THE 16TH- AND 17TH-CENTURY HISTORY OF DUNINENY

The archaeological evidence presents an interesting historical problem for the use of the documentary references to Dunineny because it is difficult to understand what the situation was on the ground in the land immediately around what is now the town of Ballycastle during the years between 1550 and 1650. There are five separate sites concerned: the excavated site of Dunineny, the present centre of Ballycastle town, the parish church of Ramoan, the port at Port Brittas, and the Friary of Bonamargy. Between 1550 and 1603 the immediate area figures rather randomly in accounts of the fights between the MacQuillans and MacDonalds, the English and the O'Neills. In his sweep through the Glens in 1565, which culminated in the battle of Glen Taisie nearby, Shane O'Neill captured a place that he called *Baile Caishlen* (Ballycastle — the place, township or town of the castle), but which Fleming, his secretary writing a month later, calls New Castle.¹⁰ In 1568 the English camped at Market Town Bay to intercept Sorley Boy MacDonnell who was trying to bring Scots soldiers into the Glens; in 1574 Essex proposed to place a garrison at Market Town bay.¹¹ In 1584 the English established a number of garrison points in the area, the chief one at the Friary building of Bonamargy. In January 1585 one Captain Wallop writes to Walsingham of the difficulty he had encountered unloading supplies in Market Town bay, because he had to use rafts to get them from ship to shore.¹² In the same month, Stanley wrote to Bagenall from the 'fort of Dunineny' where there was a ward of nine men (with perhaps fifteen others under Capt. Bowen); in March 1585 Bagenall reports that the ward was still in place in Dunineny,¹³ but it was expelled later in that year by Sorley Boy MacDonald. Sorley's son, around 1600, is recorded in a late 17th-century account of the family as having assembled his men from North Antrim at 'Dunanonigh' to attack the MacQuillans to the south.¹⁴

A first step in understanding these diverse references might be to assume that they were not necessarily all referring to separate places, but that different names might be applied to the same place. The name of Dunineny combines the Irish *dun* and *oenach*, meaning the fort of the fair or assembly.¹⁵ Bonamargy and the Margy River, which flows into the western end of Ballycastle Bay, would seem to be connected; O'Muraile suggests a number of words from which this might be

¹⁰ *Calendar of State Papers Ireland 1509–73* [henceforward *CSPI*] (London, 1860), pp. 206 and 265; Hill, op. cit. in note 3, 133–9, reprints the letters in full. Hill uses the name New Castle to contrast it with Dunineny but this need not be so.

¹¹ *CSPI 1509–73*, Nos. 377–8; *Calendar of State Papers Ireland 1574–85*, rev. ed. M. O'Dowd (London and Dublin, 2000), No. 1191.

¹² *CSPI 1574–85*, No. 549.

¹³ *CSPI 1574–85*, pp. 547–8 and 556. A ward is a garrison.

¹⁴ A. MacDonald, 'A fragment of an Irish manuscript history of the MacDonalds of Antrim', *Trans. Gaelic Soc. Inverness*, 37 (1935–6), 267.

¹⁵ N. O'Muraile (ed.), *Place Names of Northern Ireland*, 7, Co. Antrim (Belfast, 1997), 270–1.

derived, including the Irish word *margadh* (market).¹⁶ It is possible that the Irish *oenach*, *margadh* and the 'Market Town' of the English references all refer to the same place. This place might be at any one of the sites listed, but there are reasons to think that Dunineny might have been occupied earlier than the present town site of Ballycastle, apart from the minor re-occupation of the old fort by the English in 1584–5.

In 1603 Randal MacDonnell, later to become the first Earl of Antrim, was granted his vast estate in Antrim as part of the ending of the Nine Years War. He set about energetically settling tenants on the land, and exploiting the economy of his lands. Early on in this process, on 27 December 1603,¹⁷ he granted to Hugh McNeill the constableness of the 'fort of Dunaneny' with land at Port Brittas, Craigmore and Clarecastle, described as adjacent to the fort, showing that it was the present site; together with the constableness Hugh was to have the Customs of the market and town and the Customs of Port Brittas. An interesting clause is that should Sir Randal or his wife or heirs choose to reside at Dunineny, then they were to receive the market Customs and half the Port Customs, for as long as they stayed. This lease was re-issued and changed in 9 November 1612.¹⁸ Sir Randall added more lands to Hugh McNeill's grant (he is now described as 'of Dunineny'), and repeated much of the earlier lease's conditions of tolls, etc. The other main difference is that the market and town customs were now to be levied on the town of Ballycastle as well as that of Dunineny; he also makes the same stipulations about residence for both Dunineny and Ballycastle. There is a date stone of 1625 which is said to have come from the tower house beside the present church by the main square of Ballycastle. When the rebellion of 1641 broke out, Sir Randall's widow was living in this tower house in the centre of the present town of Ballycastle.

On one reading, the first centre was at Dunineny, and a move from there to that of Ballycastle, more convenient, if less of a look-out and bolt-hole, proposed or started by 1612 and completed by 1640. The old fort of Dunineny, however, would have been more than just that, but also the centre of a township of some kind in the years before. This town, associated with Sorley Boy, would also be what O'Neill and his secretary referred to in 1565: a town named after a castle of some sort.

DISCUSSION

The 17th-century building at Dunineny was built with a castle-like front, with a ditch and gate, as seen from the outside. Within, it had substantial structures built in the fashionable and English timber-frame technique.¹⁹ Defensively it was a sham for the gate house had no back or side, and there was no curtain wall or bank; much more of a sham than the simple lack of a back wall as at the gate towers at

¹⁶ O'Muraile, op. cit. in note 15, 127 and 265.

¹⁷ PRO NI D/2977/3A/2/1/1A.

¹⁸ PRO NI D/2977/3A/2/1/2; also produced at an Inquisition of 1635: Record Commission of Ireland, *Inquisitionum in officio rotulorum cancellariae Hiberniae*, 2 (London and Dublin, 1829) No. 64.

¹⁹ P. Robinson, 'Some late survivals of box-framed Plantation houses in Coleraine, Co. Londonderry', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 46 (1983), 129–36.

Cooling castle in Kent.²⁰ The lack of artefacts and the nature of the evidence from the animal bones show that this was no lordly residence, the normal use for a castle, although the Earl reserved the right to use it as such. Why was it built where it was and what was its purpose? The most likely reason is that there was a settlement (a 'town') at Dunineny: the site of the fair of its name. It was the natural focus for the new lord to plant his first centre of power in the area. The nature of the MacDonnells' power is revealed in the leases. It is entirely framed in feudal terms. In common with other leases issued by Sir Randall, Hugh McNeill is bound in return for Dunineny, as well as paying rent and providing military service in general hostings, to serve at the Courts Leet and Courts Baron,²¹ but their location is not stated. Randall's lands were divided into four baronies: Cary, Dunluce, Glenarm and Kilconway. Dunluce and Glenarm were named after, and centred on, his own residential castles: courts for those baronies would be held there. This left the other two baronies, Cary and Kilconway. I would suggest that the anomalies of Dunineny are best explained by it being primarily constructed as the administrative centre for the barony of Cary, with Clough castle (an equally odd structure as far as the few upstanding remains might indicate) for Kilconway.²²

This might explain why there was such a centre built for the barony of Cary, but not why it was built specifically at Dunineny. There could have been two reasons for choosing there, both of them because of earlier settlement. There is a good case that there was something which both Shane O'Neill and English officers could call a town sited at Dunineny. This would have formed both a natural focus and site for the exercise of MacDonnell power over the surrounding area, at least until the greater attractions of the present town site asserted themselves. These attractions are such that it is odd that the cliff-top site was ever chosen for a town, or fair. The excavation shows it unlikely that the castle site in the 16th century was anything more than a deserted promontory cut off from the mainland by an old ditch, which could be re-occupied easily by a small garrison erecting flimsy structures and melting lead for musket balls. Yet in the 19th century and earlier the site was traditionally seen as important, linked firmly to the great Sorley Boy MacDonnell, and it was probably used as a rallying point for the men of the locality. This tradition may have had a basis of truth. The site may have had a long, possibly prehistoric or very early medieval past, as witnessed by the curious turf stack (possibly intended for political display — certainly it seems not to have an obvious, more material function such as defence) set just within its ditch. This may have given the focus for first the town and then the MacDonnell refurbishment in the 17th century.

Whatever the reasons for its siting, those for its construction provide a commentary on castle building near the end of its life. In North Antrim, Randal MacDonnell, first Earl of Antrim, was responsible for at least two sites, Dunluce and Dunineny, and it is clear that castles were still very important to him and the way he structured his power and estates. This is something shared with his

²⁰ M. Johnson, *Behind the Castle Gate* (London, 2002), xiii–xvi.

²¹ PRO NI D/2977/3A/2/1/1A; repeated in PRO NI D/2977/3A/2/1/2.

²² McNeill, *op. cit.* in note 4, 124.

contemporaries who were involved in the Plantation of Ulster to the west and is more than the survival of feudal legal forms which they also shared; these were not traditional statements within Ulster, and certainly not to a Gaelic lord like Randal. Castles require investment and articulate the landscape for everyone concerned with the area; they may have a combination of military, residential and administrative roles, but he still saw them as useful, for he built them. At Dunluce he preserved at least something of the military role of the castle; at Duninenny the military function was a sham façade. His castles may have lost any real military function but between them they preserved the two other main roles. At Dunluce we see a castle as a large residence for the Earl and his household, on the lines of a contemporary English country house. At Duninenny, however, administration is the foremost purpose of the castle rather than residence. He envisaged living in it, but there is no evidence that he ever did so, and when we do find his widow in residence it is in the castle in the present town centre of Ballycastle. What was left was its purpose in ordering and governing his estates. It was important to have a place where he could hold courts, and levy Customs for the area. Many castles were built largely as the lord's residences; at Duninenny in the 17th century we see one constructed purely for administration. It is interesting that we can see this process so clearly in the buildings of a Gaelic Highlander.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Colm Donnelly of Queen's University and to Brian Williams and Claire Foley of E.H.S., without whose efforts the excavation would not have taken place at all. The work force of students worked both hard and well through the experience, but I would like to thank especially Sarah Gormley for her help. Finally, I would also like to thank Dr Eileen Murphy for her work and report on the animal bones, after the end of the excavation.

APPENDIX 1: SOIL ANALYSES

Summary of the report by S. CARTER (Headland Archaeology, Edinburgh)

Excavations at Duninenny revealed what might be interpreted as the remains of an early bank running along the inside of the ditch, comprising an irregular alignment of large sub-rounded boulders. In Trench 1 a deposit of grey clay was laid against the south side of these boulders; both the grey clay and the boulders lay on a layer of stiff red-brown clay soil which might have been the original soil over undisturbed clay. The interpretation of these soils was necessarily tentative as very little of the structure was exposed, so further testing was proposed. Two soil monoliths of the relevant sediments were collected and passed to the author for analysis. It was decided that thin-section analysis offered the best prospects for determining the nature and origins of the grey clay and therefore test the early bank hypothesis.²³ The grey clay was exposed on both sides of the 17th-century gateway and a monolith was taken from each side. Results from the monolith on the west side of the gateway were less informative: the sampled sediments lay closer to the modern ground surface and the original stratigraphy has been significantly disrupted. They will not be discussed here. Full results, and a more detailed analysis of the data, are contained in an archive report. What follows is a summary of the main findings.

²³ M. A. Courty, P. Goldberg and R. Macphail, *Soils and Micromorphology in Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1989).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sediment monolith contained the following contexts:

Column 1 (Section 4, east side of gateway)

<i>Depth</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>
0–150 mm	112	Grey brown sandy clay with grey mottle and small stones (matrix for cobbles).
150–250 mm	118	Mixed grey and dark grey clay with red-brown mottles (turf mound?).
250–390 mm	118	Dark grey clay with some lighter grey lenses.
390–470 mm	119	Dark brown sandy loam with small weathered stones (soil under mound and large stones).

Five blocks of sediment were cut from this monolith for further analysis, spanning most of the monolith. Thin sections were prepared from the blocks following standard procedures.²⁴ The thin sections were described using the descriptive scheme and terminology recommended by Bullock et al.²⁵

DISCUSSION

The nature and origin of context 119

Analysis of the composition of context 119 in thin section has shown that it is a mineral sediment with no apparent organic components. The mineral components are coarse textured and are dominantly derived from the weathering of basalt. This basic composition is consistent with a locally derived sediment but in itself does not demonstrate that 119 formed part of a soil profile and, if it did, which soil horizon it represents.

Evidence that 119 is a soil is provided by the presence of textural pedofeatures. Textural pedofeatures, in this case clay/silt coatings on the walls of channels, result from the down-washing of clay and silt through the soil profile. The coatings occur throughout the thin section of 119 yet they are absent from the lower parts of 118 that directly overlie 119. This indicates that the coatings were formed prior to the deposition of 119. Textural coatings are characteristic of subsurface soil horizons (they cannot form in biologically active topsoils) and their presence in 119 suggests that this was originally a subsurface soil horizon. The coarse texture and absence of organic components in 119 are also consistent with this designation. If this is the case, where is the upper part of the soil profile? The only candidate is the base of 118 but this banded sediment with a mineral composition distinct from 119 cannot be interpreted as an *in situ* topsoil for 119. Therefore the upper part of the soil profile represented by 119 is missing, presumably truncated by human activity. The sharp interface between organic matter-rich 118 and mineral 119 suggests that 118 was deposited directly after the soil truncation and therefore the two events are linked.

The nature and origin of context 118/105

The interpretation of context 119 has already introduced some of the evidence for the nature and origin of context 118. It has been concluded that 118 was deposited on 119 after the removal of the upper part of the soil profile that 119 is part of. Where did 118 come from and how did it accumulate?

Context 118 is a complex accumulation of laminated and non-laminated sediment bands that were originally highly organic in composition. Laminated sediment fabrics are the product of incremental sediment accumulation, in this case the accumulation primarily

²⁴ C. P. Murphy, *Thin Section Preparation of Soils and Sediments* (Berkhamsted, 1986).

²⁵ P. Bullock, N. Federoff, A. Jongerius, G. Stoops and T. Tursina, *Handbook for Soil Thin Section Description* (Wolverhampton, 1985).

of organic matter. This indicates that they represent some type of progressively accumulating peat horizon. The laminated bands are separated by non-laminated mineral-rich bands that, in a depositional environment, would have to represent sudden accumulation. This type of alternating slow and rapid deposition can be encountered in sediment basins in peaty environments but does not seem appropriate for the cliff-top position of Dunineny. It is also clear that the organic matter in 118 was not stable in its present position (hence its significant decomposition) and therefore could not have accumulated there unless a dramatic change in environmental conditions is invoked. This too is implausible. It is therefore concluded that the sediment bands that constitute 118 were created elsewhere and deposited in their present position fully formed.

The transport and deposition of coherent organic sediment bands points to one source: turf, and this provides a likely explanation for the repetitive nature of the sediment bands. Each laminated/non-laminated couplet is a single turf with four or five turves represented in the thin sections of context 118. The nature and composition of the turves provides some information about their origin. They are uniform, that is, they all come from the same source and therefore presumably arrived at the same time. The laminated bands are the remains of rapidly accumulating surface peat horizons so these would have been very wet, peaty gley soils. The mineral composition of the turves is dominated by drift-derived grains with little bedrock influence and this would be consistent with a somewhat lower lying drift-filled topographic position. It may be contrasted with the castle site where the basalt is close to the surface and dominates the soil parent material of context 119.

Interpretation of context 118 as a turf mound

The thin-section evidence is sufficient to confidently conclude that 118/105 was formed deliberately from turves. This conclusion goes only part way to providing a full archaeological interpretation as it does not answer why or when this happened. The thin-section evidence is less relevant to these more detailed questions but some possibilities will be discussed.

It seems reasonable to assume that 118/105 is the foot of a turf bank, given its archaeological context. No evidence was obtained from the thin sections from which to suggest an original height for a bank. Information about compression and preservation of the surviving basal turves does not allow any conclusions to be drawn in this case. It may be noted that highly peaty turves are not ideal for the construction of a bank as they will suffer significant and rapid decay — a pure peat bank will totally disappear after a few centuries of oxidation. The selection of peaty turves could point to short-term objectives on the part of the builders or simply a lack of choice.

Turning to when the bank may have been built, in theory it should be possible to comment on the rate of organic matter loss in the turves since deposition. In practice this rate will vary widely and is controlled by very local conditions that cannot be determined. It may help to consider that the decay of peaty turves involves a major loss of volume. There is no evidence that this process was still underway when the 17th-century gateway was cut into the remains of the bank as the turves have not apparently shrunk away from the gateway. If the turves were essentially stable by the 17th century does this rule out a late 16th-century date for the construction of the turf bank? I suspect, but cannot demonstrate, that it would take more than 50 to 70 years for the bank to decay and stabilise after the 1585 re-occupation. This suggests that the bank is much older.

APPENDIX 2: THE POTTERY

Three types of pottery were found on the site: prehistoric, everted-rim ware and post-Medieval slip ware.

PREHISTORIC

The fabric was of fine clay, firing light grey, containing some 10% of inclusions of basalt from 2–10 mm across. Example 203–3 (Fig. 11) is a heavy, upright, internally clubbed rim; 203–34 has a heavily sooted interior surface but has lost the outer surface.

EVERTED-RIM WARE

Twenty sherds were found of this unglazed, hand-made medieval coarse ware, typical of Late-medieval Ulster. The type has never been clearly defined or described as a whole, although sherds are a common feature of later medieval sites in Ulster; Ivens gives a brief discussion of the type.²⁶ It is generally similar in fabric to the Early-medieval Souterrain ware, differing from it in form and distribution. A preliminary study of sites in northern Co. Antrim where both types of pottery have been found shows that the fabrics varied more between sites than between the pottery types, confirming that the pottery is the product of very localised production.²⁷ In form, everted-rim pottery is defined by the rim and shoulder forms, which involve a strong shoulder between the globular body and the neck of the pot, above which the neck form may vary from vertical to strongly everted. The Dunineny pots belong to a group of pots also found on other sites in Antrim where the rim is gently flared rather than sharply everted.

The fabric of all sherds is reasonably uniform, moderately gritted with up to 5% inclusions. All sherds contain fine mica and rounded quartz grains; in all but three sherds these are 1–2 mm across, with less than 1 mm in the three. The other inclusions are haematite (5 sherds) and basalt (3 sherds); 1 sherd has both: the size of these inclusions varies more than that of the quartz grains. Example 316–112/122 (joining sherds of a base) is interesting for the pattern of its inclusions. The general fabric has sparse quartz inclusions (0.5%) but on the basal surface the frequency rises to 2–5% with additional voids of eroded grains. The quartz had adhered particularly to the base, probably because sand was used to separate the base of the pots from the turntable on which they were made, rather as Ivens postulated to explain the grass marking also found.²⁸ The fabric would appear to have been made from very clean clay which had sparse basalt and haematite inclusions occurring naturally, as would be expected from the local volcanic geology. Such clays can occur in pockets along the rivers in the vicinity, where they cross the low-lying grounds near the sea. Varying quantities of fine quartz sand, available from Ballycastle beach, were then added to the clay. Not surprisingly, the fabric is very similar to that of the second commonest found in the pottery from Doonmore, less than four miles away at the east end of Ballycastle Bay.²⁹

SLIP WARE

Four sherds were found, none larger than c. 3 sq cm. The sherds are all of fine red fabric, without visible inclusions, 3–4 mm thick with dark olive glaze covering stripes of yellow slip. They are too small to give a reliable provenance, but may be assumed to be English.

²⁶ R. J. Ivens, 'Notes on medieval coarse pottery in the Ulster Museum, 1988', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 51 (1988), 127–31.

²⁷ S. McMullen, A Comparison between the Souterrain Ware and the Everted Rim Ware in Co. Antrim (unpubl. B.Sc. dissertation, School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University of Belfast, 2000).

²⁸ R. J. Ivens, 'A note on grass-marked pottery', *J. Irish Archaeol.*, 2 (1984), 77–9.

²⁹ Childe, op. cit. in note 9; McMullen, op cit. in note 27, 52: fabric E.

APPENDIX 3: THE ANIMAL BONES

Summary of the report by EILEEN M. MURPHY (Tab. 2)

A small assemblage of animal bone was retrieved during excavations at Dunineny. The faunal remains were recovered from 27 contexts which had originated from four context groups — the gate structure, the interior of the castle, the lower ditch and a possible bank from an earlier fort. Each of the separate contexts were analysed individually, but since the quantity of bone is so small the material has been amalgamated by period into two groups. The full report is lodged in the excavation archive.

Possible bank (Trench 2, contexts 203–209)

Only 162 fragments were identifiable and MNI values of one were recorded for cattle, ovicaprids, pig and dog. In terms of fragment counts, cattle produced 59.3%, ovicaprids 38.9%; two pig bones and one dog bone were found. The majority came from context 204 at the top of the possible bank.

The bones were generally in a poor state of preservation, with many displaying marked surface erosion and a preponderance of fragments of cattle and ovicaprid teeth. The skeletal elements present, however, would tend to indicate that the assemblage genuinely did largely comprise cattle, ovicaprid and pig skull and lower leg bones, generally associated with poor quality meat joints. The occurrence of a calcined cattle first phalanx is a further indication that people were cooking metapodial-phalangeal joints. More robust bones from higher class meat joints, such as pelves and scapulae, were not represented in the assemblage. The only bone characteristic of a higher class meat joint was an ovicaprid distal humerus. Further evidence for butchery practice was the occurrence of one large and six medium-sized ribs which had been deliberately chopped into short lengths.

The only dog bone present in the assemblage was a fused first phalanx which displayed clear knife cuts on the posterior surface of its proximal end characteristic of the detachment of the paw during skinning.

Interior, gate structure and lower ditch

A total of 519 fragments were identifiable: cattle 72.4%, ovicaprids 22.4%; pig 4.6%, in terms of fragment counts. Two horse bones and a fragment of cetacean vertebra were recovered from the lower ditch, while one rabbit bone was found in the interior. These figures were similar for the MNI values present which indicated that at least three cattle, two pigs and two ovicaprids were represented on the site.

The bones from these areas of the site, particularly the gate structure, appeared to be in a better state of preservation than those recovered from the possible fort bank. A number of skeletal elements displayed evidence of burning, which ranged from blackened bones characteristic of scorching to pale grey or white calcined bones which had been burned at high temperatures either by cooking or through the action of the fire which destroyed the building in Trench 4.³⁰

The majority of cattle bones present in the assemblage comprised skull and lower leg bones, although small numbers of higher class meat joints represented by fragments of scapula, pelvis, femur and humerus were also evident. Three phalanges display cutmarks and two were calcined (one was split longitudinally), probably from cooking at high temperatures. Many of the cattle metapodia displayed knife cuts at their proximal ends and a number had been chopped through at their proximal thirds. In addition, a metacarpal recovered from the interior (context 310) had been split in two longitudinally, presumably for marrow extraction. A number of burnt teeth were recovered from the

³⁰ R. L. Lyman, *Vertebrate Taphonomy* (Cambridge, 1994), 385.

TABLE 2

DETAILS OF FRAGMENTS AND MNI VALUES FOR THE ANIMAL BONE RECOVERED FROM THE POSSIBLE FORT BANK (TRENCH 1 — LISTED HERE AS 'BANK') COMPARED TO THOSE FOR THE LOWER DITCH, THE GATE HOUSE AND THE INTERIOR (LISTED HERE AS 'OTHER')

	Cattle		Ovicaprid		Pig		Horse		Rabbit		Dog	
	Bank	Other	Bank	Other	Bank	Other	Bank	Other	Bank	Other	Bank	Other
HORN	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SKULL	—	35	2	13	—	7	—	—	—	—	—	—
MANDIBLE	3	33	—	13	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
TEETH	86	244 (3)	54	39	1	8	—	—	—	—	—	—
ATLAS	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
AXIS	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCAPULA	—	1	—	5	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
HUMERUS	—	1	1	5 (2)	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
RADIUS	1	6	3	10 (2)	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
ULNA	—	—	—	1	—	3 (2)	—	—	—	—	—	—
METACARPAL	2	11 (3)	1	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
PELVIS	1	2 (2)	—	5	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
FEMUR	—	3	—	6	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
PATELLA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TIBIA	—	1	—	8	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
FIBULA	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
ASTRALAGUS	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CALCANEUS	—	2	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
METATARSAL	—	12 (2)	—	7 (2)	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
TAR/CAR	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
PHALANX 1	2	10	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
PHALANX 2	1	8 (2)	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
PHALANX 3	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
SACRUM	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	96	376	63	116	2	24	—	2	—	1	1	—
TOTAL %	59.3	72.4	38.9	22.4	1.2	4.6	—	0.4	—	0.2	0.6	—
MNI	1	3	1	2	1	2	—	1	—	1	1	—
MNI %	25	33.4	25	22.2	25	22.2	—	11.1	—	11.1	25	—
Other bones from the ‘bank’												
52 unidentified			3 unidentified burnt bone					1 bird				
2 large vertebrae			1 large rib									
1 medium vertebra			6 medium ribs									
Other bones from the ‘other contexts’												
283 unidentified			82 unidentified burnt bone					1 cetacean				
7 bird			92 medium ribs					16 large ribs				
3 medium vertebrae			4 large vertebrae									

lower ditch (context 217), which is probably indicative that mandibulae were being cooked. The occurrence of butchered and cooked phalanges, metapodia and mandibles is characteristic of a low-status diet. An unfused proximal metatarsal from a young calf had been chopped at its proximal third and is an indication that young animals were also being slaughtered.

Although skull fragments predominated for ovicaprids and pigs, higher class meat joints represented by humeri, femora and pelves fragments were well represented. It would seem that the occupants of the site had access to a wider variety of meat cuts from ovicaprids and pigs than those of cattle. The majority of rib fragments from both medium-sized and large animals appeared to have been deliberately chopped into short lengths. It is probable that this butchery practice relates to the secondary processing of the thorax.

One fragment of horse metatarsal displayed a cut mark on the posterior surface of its proximal end which could be related to the detachment of the lower leg from the upper limb or skinning. The fragment of cetacean vertebra recovered from the lower ditch (context 221) appeared to have been chopped into a square-shaped section, possibly the result of butchery.

Due to the small sample size only limited information could be attained relating to the age-at-death and sex profiles of the animals. In cattle, the data from epiphyseal fusion and tooth eruption would tend to suggest that young calves and older animals were not represented in the assemblage. The data would also tend to suggest that young and older ovicaprids were not represented in the assemblage. All pig bones were unfused which would indicate that the majority of animals represented on the site were immature, killed during their first year. A foetal pig femur and fibula were recovered which may indicate that pigs were being reared in close proximity to the castle or that pregnant sows were occasionally slaughtered on the site.

DISCUSSION

The two assemblages of animal bone recovered during the excavations at Dunineny were small and therefore it was only possible to obtain limited data pertaining to diet and livestock husbandry practices. The butchery practices of both assemblages were similar, particularly in terms of the exploitation of cattle carcasses. When preservation issues were eliminated it appeared that exploitation of cattle skulls and lower leg bones was a genuine feature of both assemblages. These joints of meat are considered to be poor in quality and are a characteristic of low-status consumption. A study of post-medieval faunal assemblages in Amsterdam attempted to differentiate between wealthy and poor households on the basis of the meat cuts and species represented in the material. The faunal assemblage considered to represent the poorest household was found largely to comprise fragments of cattle and ovicaprid skull, metapodia and phalanges. It was noted that even the second phalanx had been broken open for marrow extraction, and it was concluded that these people had probably lived on the charity of the local butcher.³¹ This situation is not too far removed from that apparent at Dunineny, although it should be remembered that better class meat cuts from ovicaprids and pigs did occur. Nevertheless, the faunal assemblage is not characteristic of the high-class consumption one would expect of nobility, and it may be taken to suggest that the lord and his entourage spent little or no time at Dunineny. In addition, no exotic animals were represented in the assemblages — the rabbit is possibly indicative of hunting, while the cetacean may have been washed up on the nearby coast.

³¹ F. G. Ijzereef, 'Social differentiation from animal bone studies', 41–53 in D. Serjeantson and T. Waldron (eds.), *Diet and Craft in Towns: The Evidence of Animal Remains from the Roman to the Post-Medieval Periods* (BAR Brit. Ser., 199, Oxford, 1989).